

Reaching the Hard -to- Reach Nomads through Open and Distance Learning: A Case
Study of Nomadic Education Programme in Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

This paper attempts to examine the genesis and impact of the introduction of the Open and Distance Learning (ODL) programme in the implementation of the Nomadic Education Programme (NEP) in Nigeria. The salient issues discussed include needs assessment, rationale, components, strategies, curriculum and mode of delivery, facilitators, teachers, instructional materials, achievements, challenges and lessons learnt. Similarly, major access factors and success indicators witnessed as a result of the systematic implementation of the programme were also identified and highlighted. The specific challenges and constraints of the programme were also analysed and various measures taken to overcome them pinpointed. The paper concluded that the Commission's Open and Distance Learning (ODL) programme for more than a decade has been able to record successes in various facets. The modest achievements include increase in awareness, access and success in the provision of basic education, literacy, numeracy and life skills by the target group. It has also facilitated the promotion of social justice in terms of gender, socio-economic, cultural diversities and skills development. These have played and continue to play a key role in the quality assurance and success of NEP. The Nigerian model of ODL programme if adopted by other countries for their marginalized groups could overcome exclusion and fast track the attainment of Education for All (EFA) goals.

INTRODUCTION

Nigeria's National Policy on Education (NPE) defines Nomadic Education as the provision of basic education to the children of the disadvantaged and marginalized nomadic populations in the country. It estimates the population of the nomads as 9.3 million comprising of three target groups namely; nomadic pastoralists, migrant fisher folks and migrant farmers. The goals of Nomadic Education Programme (NEP) are to: provide nomads with relevant and fundamental basic education and improve their survival skills by providing them with knowledge and skills that will enable them raise their productivity and income as well as empower them to participate effectively in the socio-economic and political affairs in the country. In order to attain these goals, the National Commission for Nomadic Education (NCNE) has the mandate to: a) formulate policies and guidelines in all matters relating to nomadic education Nigeria; b) provide funds for research and personnel development for the improvement of nomadic education; the develop programmes on nomadic education and provide equipment, instructional materials, construction of classrooms and other facilities for nomadic education.

The Federal Government of Nigeria realized that unless a special educational provision was made for the nomads, they would have no access to formal and non-formal education and thus established the NCNE in 1989. It is charged with the implementation of NEP, which is aimed at providing and widening access to quality basic education for nomads (i.e. nomadic pastoralists, migrant fisher folks and migrant farmers) boosting literacy and equipping them with skills and competencies to enhance their well-being and participation in national development and integration.

To meet this challenge effectively, the Commission devised a series of innovative approaches and strategies which include a distance learning scheme for Adult Pastoralists and Interactive Radio Instruction for nomadic children and youths. The use of the radio as a strategy overcomes the barriers of space, time schedule and constant migration. It permits flexibility in time-tabling and scheduling of tuition for nomads. The genesis of the introduction of open and distance learning programme for nomads in Nigeria was hinged on the adoption of a multifaceted approach in the implementation of NEP.

Reaching out to the illiterate nomadic populations be it adults, children and youths is the most difficult task because the target groups are characterized by serious exclusion factors. Nigerian radio schools have used radio didactically, as the main medium of instruction to complement conventional classroom teaching and learning with profound implications for the way radio is used for adult literacy and children education in general and for nomads in particular. Information and communication technologies such as radio have long been used in education and literacy in Nigeria as well as other countries and its deployment to reach Nigerian nomads has indeed been a success story.

Rationale of the Paper

The paper will attempt to address two components of the radio project in nomadic education, namely; nomadic adult literacy programme by radio and Interactive Radio Instruction (IRI) for nomadic children and youths. The salient issues of the ODL programme for nomads will be examined and major developments witnessed as a result of the attainment of modest achievements in the radio project are to be identified and highlighted. The specific challenges of the radio programme over the years will be analysed and various measures taken to overcome these challenges will be proffered. Important lessons derived from mass instruction by radio for delivery of basic education and literacy for nomads will be identified and recommendations made for future prospects.

SALIENT ISSUES ON OPEN AND DISTANCE LEARNING FOR NOMADS

The following salient issues are significant in using the on open and distance learning programme in the design and implementation of nomadic education programme: needs assessment, components, strategies, curriculum and mode of delivery, facilitators, teachers, instructional materials, achievements, challenges and evaluation

Needs Assessment

The Commission has over the years realized the importance of radio to the pastoral nomads. It was established that most nomadic families own transistor radios. A good number of them are usually seen with portable radio sets hung over their shoulders. While herding, they listen to some programmes and subsequently discuss some of the issues raised in the programmes. The research further revealed that 95% of the respondents were anxious to air their views on matters affecting them. Ezeomah (1998) posited that distance education programmes for nomads should be designed to reach target groups as soon as the children acquire the rudiments of reading and writing. It is also important to use their traditional systems of information gathering and dissemination to support distance programme. Distance learning strategies using advance technology according to Aminu (1999), is very attractive, but can for obvious reasons only be developed very gradually.

Rationale

The experience of the NCNE indicates that the strategies it currently uses to implement the NEP alone cannot lead to any dramatic increase in the levels of access to basic education; hence its decision to design and implement a distance learning scheme for the nomadic pastoralists in Nigeria (Tahir & Muhammad,1998).This initiative according to Tahir and Umar (2000), was premised on four broad principles, namely to: 1) Identify and implement cost effective approaches for broadening access and ensuring equity and quality basic education to the hard to reach nomads and 2) Overcome problems, challenges and constraints impeding the effective implementation of NEP and the fast tract attainment of

its set objectives 3) Facilitate the resolution of the contradiction between the demands imposed by conventional schooling requiring pupils to attend school at certain times of the day and the demands of child labour in the production systems of nomads 4) Exploit the educational potentials of radio in extending more learning opportunities to the nomads.

Components

The open and distance learning programme for nomads according to Tahir and Umar (2000) has two broad components, namely: Schooling and Adult Education. The schooling component is intended to increase the level of access to basic education for nomadic children.

Strategies

In a bid to achieve the set objectives, the following implementation strategies were developed and adopted: Advocacy, mobilization and sensitization of stakeholders; Establishment of adult literacy centres in nomadic communities; Recruitment, training and deployment of instructors with nomadic background for sustainability and; Adaptation and development of integrated literacy primer; Use of Radio- Adult component and IRI and Quality assurance. Indeed a multifaceted approach as a strategy for delivery of adult literacy for nomads was adopted in form of radio e.g. the radio, lessons on tapes, paper-based materials, formation and management of radio listening groups as learning centres.

Curriculum

One of the features of the adult component of ODL for nomads is discussion of contents by learners through a participatory approach. It is also cross-curricula and multi-dimensional. The IRI Master Plans and Sequence for children and youth is cross-curricula and based on the approved Nomadic Education Curricula in four core subject areas. The focus of the IRI curriculum is on functional literacy, numeracy and life skills.

Mode of Delivery

According to Aminu (1999), the radio holds great promise and can be found in the remotest dwelling of pastoralist nomads (or **ruga**). Evening lessons or early morning ones, taking into account the nomadic child's schedule, have been largely effective. The types of radio formats used in the delivery of radio messages includes: straight talks, discussions, drama, lecture etc. In order to track the learners, the Commission formed radio listening groups. A total of 165 Radio Listening Groups (RLGs) were formed nation-wide from which 20 were randomly selected as model learning centres for the pilot phase of the scheme in Kaduna State. An open broadcasting van was procured, equipped and used to reach out to the nomads as well.

Teachers and Facilitators

In essence, for the two components of literacy by radio programme, the teacher and facilitator is central in achieving the set objectives. From 2006-2007 a total of 526 nomadic teachers were trained on IRI methodology. In 2008, through the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) intervention funds 120 nomadic teachers, 75 facilitators and 65 mentors and monitors in six pilot states were trained on IRI Methodology; 40 IRI educational songs developed, composed and produced and 20 studio technicians trained.

Instructional Materials

Relevant instructional materials were procured and put to use by the Commission. In 2003, the World Bank funded the Commission's radio programme with 1000 pieces each of non battery wind up radio and audio cassette recorder in addition to 500 units of blank audio cassette and 140 Mini tape recorders. In 2005 the Open Learning Systems Education Trust (OLSET) of South Africa provided the Commission with 200 units of radio/cassette players; 19,800 units of audio cassettes; 170 copies of teacher's guides; 11,000 copies of activity books; 10,000 copies of readers; 200 copies each of farm, urban, wildlife, African posters, colour charts; pictures and alphabets. Similarly, in 2007 the Commission procured 548 wind-up radios. In 2008 the MDG's office funded the development of 90 IRI Scopes/Sequence/ Master Plans and scripts for grade 1; developed and produced 400 copies of IRI materials such as training manuals, freeze books, posters, calendars, charts ,readers, flash and number cards.

PROGRAMME IMPLEMENTATION

Adult Component

Having recognized the importance of radio to the nomads, the Commission initiated, designed and started a sensitization programme on radio on 22nd August 1996; the programme tagged "**Don Makiyaya a Ruga**" meaning "**for the Nomads in their Homesteads**". It is broadcast twice a week on the Federal Radio Corporation of Nigeria (FRCN) Kaduna. A thirty minutes package is targeted at the adults of target groups. The programme is broadcast in Hausa, Fulfulde and Shuwa-Arabic, The Fulfulde programme was titled "**Ngam Waynabe**" meaning "**For the Nomads**". It was empirically evident through a survey that learners liked both the use of recorded audio cassettes and live transmission of the episodes.

Based on the success recorded, the programme was scaled up for the benefit of Shuwa-Arab pastoralists' tagged "**Al-shay al-ray**" and Kanuri pastoralists titled "**Fraskram Malum Shay**". These programmes were produced and transmitted on Yobe State Broadcasting Corporation, Damaturu in 2002. 20 radio listening groups were randomly selected as model learning centres for the Shuwa-Arab and Kanuri pastoralists found mainly in Borno and Yobe states and around the Lake Chad Basin in the north-east. A total of 14 episodes each were transmitted. A summative evaluation of the programmes was conducted and the findings revealed that the projects were successful.

The Commission also produced and transmitted radio programmes on Integrated health issues in four languages, namely, Fulfulde -“**Ko Larani Njamu Meden**”, Shuwa-Arabic titled “**Al-Hiyal Anta**”, Hausa-“**Ingantacciyar Rayuwa**” and Pidgin English called “**Beta Living**” from 2006-2009. Transmission of each of the four languages is made up of twenty six (26) episodes. The Fulfulde and Hausa language episodes were broadcast on FRCN Kaduna; Shuwa-Arab language by Yobe Broadcasting Corporation, Damaturu and Pidgin English by FRCN Enugu. As at June, 2010 there were 215 adult literacy centres nation-wide out of which 71 were male (66.9 %) while 144 were female centres (33.1%). These centres had a cumulative enrolment of 8,270 learners comprising of 3,380 male (40.8 %) and 4,890 female (59.2%). Out of those enrolled, 4,785 graduated at basic literacy level representing 57.9 % comprising of 2,107 male (44.0 %) and 2,678 female (56.0%) respectively.

SCHOOLING: Children and Youth Component

Due to the success of the adult component and in a bid to increase access and improve quality of tuition in nomadic schools, the NCNE introduced a school based IRI programme. This is geared towards enhancement of numeracy, literacy and life skills acquisition using IRI; a child centered -methodology. The Commission began its pilot, using the model from the OLSET in South Africa from 2004-2006. From 2006 to date the Nigerian model is being pilot tested in six states, one in each of the geo-political zones of the country. The indigenous version of the IRI for nomads is tagged “**Radio School**”. The classroom teacher has a critical role to play for any implementation of a successful IRI project. Since it is not in any way intended that the radio teacher to replace the classroom teacher but merely to complement the later. In other words the radio teacher is never a substitute. Currently, for the one in the classroom the IRI series are to be broadcast in radio stations in the six pilot states .i.e. Adamawa, Anambra, Bayelsa, Kaduna, Plateau, and Oyo states.

SUCCESS INDICATORS

The following modest achievements and impact have been accomplished: 60 nomadic communities from six pilot states mobilized and sensitized to support the IRI Project; two (2) digital radio recording studios have been established and state of the art equipment procured and installed; sixty nomadic schools have been selected for the pilot study of the school-based IRI programme. Also provided are audiovisual materials and assisted face to face tuition.

The ODL which aims at making basic education more accessible to nomadic children and adults was the first of its kind in sub-Saharan Africa, and its pilot phase was considered very successful. There have been great improvements in the quality of curriculum content delivery, particularly in the core subjects; Increased overall learning achievement of nomadic school children and adults and achievements in collective social action by learners; Improved the knowledge and skills of teachers and facilitators through series of capacity development; Significant raise in the level of pupils enrolment, regular attendance,

progression, graduation and transition rates and facilitated the attainment of a relatively high and uniform standards in nomadic schools and literacy centres also testify to the success of the scheme.

In quantitative terms the successes are increase in the number of nomadic schools from 329 in 1990 to 860 in 1995, 1,154 in 2000, 1,594 in 2005, 2885 in 2009; sustained increase in total school enrolment among nomads from 18,831 in 1990 to 92,510 in 1995 and 193,243 in 2000; 375,893 in 2005 and 457,913 in 2009; promoting nomadic girl child education from 5,068 in 1990 to 35,751 in 1995, 80,291 in 2000, 153,489 in 2005 204,631 in 2009; increase in school completion figures from 1,462 in 1997, in 3,135 in 2000, 18,265 in 2003 24,437 in 2005 40,660 in 2008 and increase in the number of extension agents and facilitators from 40 in 1992 to 50 in 2009.

Lessons Learnt

Based on the lessons learnt in implementing the ODL scheme for nomads in Nigeria, It is pertinent to note that the following best practices as promising initiatives instituted by the Commission over the years: Effective design and delivery strategies; Suitable mode of mobilization and sensitization; the decentralization of the decision-making processes as well as the fairly effective coordination of activities of the various agencies and communities involved in programme implementation. Such lessons also include; recruitment of teachers and facilitators from the nomadic communities and their training and retraining by the Commission; development and adaptation of the radio curriculum for the target group; development, production and distribution of appropriate instructional materials; Design, development and production of Radio learning series and Sustainability by RLGs.

Challenges

Despite the modest impact made so far in the ODL for nomads in Nigeria, their literacy level is still low. In the course of implementation of literacy by the radio component of the NEP, the Commission is faced with daunting challenges and constraints such as: Under-funding and late release of approved funds; most states and Local Governments are yet to buy into the literacy by radio programmes for nomads;. There is also difficulty in retention of facilitators in nomadic literacy centres as well as the dearth of facilitators/instructors in terms of adequate quantity and quality; relatively low level of enrolments and attendance; literacy by radio facilitation skills in short supply. At present these human and material resource shortages constrain the speed at which scaling up and replication beyond the nomadic pastoralists for the adult's components can be achieved.

Overcoming the Challenges

The following initiatives have been put in place by the Commission as measures to overcome the above identified challenges: Recruitment and retention of teachers and facilitators from the nomadic communities and their training and retraining; Development, production and distribution of adapted instructional materials for the radio programme; Sustainability by RLGs and Collaboration and partnership

with stakeholders. Securing of broadcast band for educational programmes from the National Broadcasting Commission (NBC) and Establishment of a full complement of open school for nomads

Conclusion

This paper has discussed the NCNE's ODL Scheme as a successful strategy for reaching the hard to reach nomads in Nigeria. The scheme has recorded increase in awareness, access and success in the provision of basic education, literacy, numeracy and life skills by the target group. It has also facilitated the promotion of social justice in terms of gender, socio-economic, cultural diversities and skills development. These have played and continue to play a key role in quality assurance and success of nomadic education. This will also strengthen its impact; sustain synergy and commitment of all stakeholders in terms of harnessing the existing human, institutional and capital resources. In addition, it will motivate support by International organizations, thus bringing about the desired impact on the hard- to reach people of the world as well as fast-track global literacy by ODL. Finally, the Radio School for Nomads has turned out to be a viable weapon of mass basic functional literacy thus gradually overcoming exclusion.

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